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Symbolic Types – Journalism and Politics

This article undertakes two separate cases where the symbolic actions of agents, senders of a message, play a crucial role in determining receivers' behavior, not only during the sending process and shortly after the end of transmission, but produce also a long-lasting effect for many years and even decades thereafter. Although the cases discussed here stem from different cultural backgrounds, Polish and Swedish, they share common features which may be easily overlooked by a superficial analysis. Shedding light on the specificity of the cases, the circumstances they occurred in, the modifications they underwent and the comments they raised would help in our better understanding the meaning of symbolic actions undertaken by members of contemporary societies – users of post-modern cultures rooted in European history and tradition. The legacy of two world-renowned journalists and writers, Ryszard Kapuściński (1932–2007) and Stieg Larsson (1954–2004), has been put in question, generating significant consequences for the perception of their works and the authors' reputations themselves, especially regarding the moral choices they made.

Doubts about credibility of their works were raised predominantly in 2010 after the publication of two separate books dedicated to them. The Polish edition of *Kapuściński non-fiction*, written by Artur Domosławski, and the original Swedish version of *Min vän Stieg Larsson (Stieg Larsson, my friend)*, by Kurdo Baksi, evoked strong criticism expressed by the loyal readers and co-workers of Kapuściński and Larsson. At the same time, however, the publications gained approval by critics who gave the truth priority no matter how the real picture looked.

Both writers began their careers as journalists – Kapuściński as a reporter for *Sztandar Młodych (The Youth Banner)*¹ in the late 1950s and Larsson in the 1970s as

¹ A socialist newspaper addressed to young people.

a graphic designer (later providing his own text) at TT, Sweden's largest news agency.² In their professional lives, over time, socially and politically oriented topics came to the fore, becoming a specific feature of their works. It was particularly visible in the Larsson case, who gradually turned to critical journalism with an open, active engagement in the anti-racist movements in Sweden from the 1970s until his death.

The growing ethnic and racial diversity of Swedish society was the result of the immigration policy introduced by the Swedish state in the 1950s. Labor shortages had been consecutively covered by importing foreign workers from South-European countries and later also from outside Europe. In addition, Sweden's participation in humanitarian actions on a global scale prompted the state to open its doors to refugees from many countries: Turkey (Kurds), Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador.³ This policy, however generally supported by society, was contested by groups who imagined Sweden as a mono-ethnic and "white" country. Their dissent took the forms of open criticism addressed to the government and verbal and physical abuse directed against anti-racism activists, among them, Stieg Larsson.

Real and symbolic power of death

Stieg Larsson's fame grew significantly after his death, not only because it was premature and unexpected, but also due to a specific, partly mysterious (created rather than real) information spread about his death. Larsson passed away on the 9th of November 2004 due to a heart attack while he was on the way to his office located on the seventh floor in a building in central Stockholm. The elevator was out of order, which forced the journalist to use the steps. For a heavy smoker and dedicated coffee drinker such as Larsson, the walk proved deadly. The heart attack had probably several origins, not only cigarette overuse but also the constant stress caused and kept alive by regular threats from far-right extremists. Some publicly circulated rumors suggested an assassination performed on Larsson by his most strident foes. This version, however, has been officially excluded.⁴

Many examples from the past demonstrate that an artist's work may gain much more attention from his contemporaries when he or she is not any longer among them.⁵ A universal rule of human behavior? This also applied to Larsson.

² Larsson at that time co-edited a science fiction fanzine *Sfären*. His engagement in science fiction writings might be of relevance while discussing his work as a journalist.

³ More on Swedish immigration policy in: M. Banaś, *Swedish integration policy towards immigrants (Szwedzka polityka integracyjna wobec imigrantów)*, Kraków 2010, a summary in English available: [on line] www.monikabanas.org.

⁴ *Stieg Larsson. Biography*, [on line] <http://www.biography.com/people/stieg-larsson-17181752>, April 17, 2015.

⁵ A couple of many examples of great artists who died marginalized by their contemporaries: Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, El Greco, Paul Cézanne. In post-modern times we may

Coming from the Swedish far north (Norrland) he moved to Stockholm in the late 1970s where he was employed by TT – Sweden's largest news agency. At the beginning he worked as a graphic specialist, only seldom adding comment to his graphs, tables and maps. Anders Hellberg, also a TT journalist and for many years a co-worker of Larsson, did not notice his colleagues' special gift for creative writing. Thus, to him, learning the name of the *Millennium*'s author came as a bit of a surprise.⁶ According to Hellberg, a vast contribution to the novel trilogy might have been made by Eva Gabrielsson, Larsson's life partner for over three decades. Gabrielsson, an architect and left-oriented activist, denied at the beginning her involvement in the scenario, viewing her role rather as a linguistic corrector and a proof reader. At a later time, however, she seemed to modify her statements about her creative input in *Millennium*. In an interview given to the Danish magazine "Politiken" she admitted her involvement in the plot construction, particularly in the years 2002-2003.⁷ In another interview from March 2015, Gabrielsson stressed that her deceased partner would not have allowed anyone to intervene in the story construction.⁸ Apparently she meant a third person or persons not herself. Such a conclusion is drawn from the following accounts she gave to a Guardian reporter:

The actual writing, the craftsmanship, was Stieg's. But the content is a different matter. There are a lot of my thoughts, ideas and work in there. (...) and we went out to double- and triple-check some places, to discuss where people would live and why – according to the story, their character, or financial status. So there's a large part of my knowledge, life and world in it, and large parts of his. Then there's this grey zone that's joint.⁹

An account of Eva Gabrielsson's involvement and active participation in the trilogy writing process had been undertaken by Kurdo Baksi, a journalist and publicist who cooperated with Larsson for many years. They met in the 1990s united by a common goal to "fight with word" against extreme anti-racial and anti-immigrant movements in Sweden. Both worked on separate projects – magazines: "Svartvitt" (Baksi) and "Expo" (Larsson) – serving as platforms for strong criticism

look at the growing numbers of sold music albums of artists who passed away, e.g. Michael Jackson, Whitney Huston, Amy Winehouse.

⁶ Hellberg expressed his doubts more powerfully in an interview given to Finlo Rohrer from the BBC News Magazine, [on line] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/8483574.stm, April 20, 2015.

⁷ S. Brovall, "Stieg Larssons samlever. 'Jeg læste ikke bare korrektur'", [in:] *Politiken*, 26th January 2010, [on line] <http://politiken.dk/kultur/ECE887609/stieg-larssons-samlever-jeg-laeste-ikke-bare-korrektur/>, April 21, 2015.

⁸ C. Bas-Wohlert, "Stieg Larsson's partner appalled by 'Millennium business'", [in:] *Business Insider*, 27th March 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-stieg-larssons-partner-appalled-by-millennium-business-2015-3> (April 22, 2015).

⁹ K. Cochrane, "Stieg Larsson's partner. 'It's odd to have to prove our life together existed'", [in:] *The Guardian*, 4th October 2011, [on line] <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/04/stieg-larsson-partner-eva-gabrielsson>, April 22, 2015.

of individuals and groups engaged in actions inspired by chauvinism and wrongly understood nationalism. The magazines started to cooperate closely in 1999 and the years to come and offered both journalists the opportunity to become, if not friends, than good colleagues. This picture emerges from a book written by Kurdo Baksi dedicated to the *Millennium*'s author.¹⁰

Min vän Stieg Larsson (Stieg Larsson, my friend) published in 2010 delivered a deeply personal narrative about their common work, their engagement as activists and their friendship. Baksi portrayed Larsson as a bit introverted, but at the same time, a demanding individual, dedicated entirely to the mission expressed in "Expo" and also, although indirectly, in the trilogy. His main goals were, once again, combatting extremism in all forms and erasing the hidden discrimination of women that he saw not only in Swedish society.

The book written in a memoir style, provoked a vigorous debate around Larsson as a journalist (or reporter as he called himself) and a novelist: first, because Baksi suggested that his friend did not have a natural gift for journalism, which resulted in many necessary stylistic corrections and even modifications of the data to serve an article's intent; and second, possessing insufficient creative writing skills, Stieg might have used some help from Eva Gabrielsson. The latter "suggestion" was coupled with the fact that, in 2002, Eva had started preparing material for her own book about Per Olof Hallman (1869-1941), a Swedish architect and urbanist. Exactly at that time Stieg began work on a draft of the futurist trilogy. Some of the names and places relevant in Gabrielsson's story had been used later by Larsson, saving time for necessary research needed to give the fiction an illusion of reality.¹¹ The contribution of his wife to-be to the writing process of the *Millennium* seemed to go much deeper than officially stated. In a couple of interviews given to Swedish and foreign newspapers and magazines (*Svenska Dagbladet*, *Politiken*, *The Guardian*) she suggested co-writing and advising.¹² Thus, Stieg Larsson's single authorship of the trilogy, indirectly indicated by Kurdo Baksi in his book and by Gabrielsson herself in some of the interviews, has been put in question.

Such ghost-writing, however, was in turn entirely rejected by a group of established Swedish journalists and writers, colleagues and former co-workers of Larsson. Robert Aschberg – "Expo" publisher, Kenneth Ahlborn – a TT editor and Larsson's direct chief for over a decade, Richard Slätt – former "Expo" journalist, and many others expressed their strong protest against the words, actions, and implications harming Stieg's reputation as a credible, fully professional and independent

¹⁰ K. Baksi, *Min vän Stieg Larsson*, Norstedt 2010. There are also other books about Stieg Larsson. One of them is written by E. Gabrielsson, "Millennium, Stieg & Jag", [in:] *Natur & Kultur* 2011, another one by J.-E. Pettersson, "Stieg Larsson. Journalisten, författaren, idealisten", [in:] *Telegram Bokförlag* 2011.

¹¹ K. Cochrane, op. cit., [on line] <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/04/stieg-larsson-partner-eva-gabrielsson>; see also K. Thunberg, "En egen historia", *Svenska Dagbladet*, January 16th 2011, [on line] http://www.svd.se/en-egen-historia_5867055, May 16, 2015.

¹² K. Thunberg, op. cit.

reporter and writer.¹³ Slätt even urged retraction and the withdrawal of the book from the market.¹⁴

Turbulence around Larsson's legacy was fueled also by a legal dispute that started between Eva Gabrielsson and Larsson's family – his father and younger brother. According to Swedish law only individuals registered as a married couple have the right to inherit in the case of death of one of the partners. Since Eva and Stieg never got married (although they had planned it) and the writer did not leave a will, the court ruled in favor of the family. The decision left Gabrielsson full of bitterness, resentment and mistrust of the Swedish legal system, which she found oppressive to women – something Larsson persistently criticized in his articles and texts. The first novel in the trilogy with its Swedish original title may be one of the most explicit evidences of the writer's hidden fight against misogyny (*Män som hatar kvinnor*, direct English translation: *Men that hate women*, English official version: *The girl with a dragon tattoo*).

Eva Gabrielsson, had lived with Larsson for over three decades, shared with him not only a flat but also time, views, attitudes and passions: literature & campaigning for equal rights for women and men. She admitted in her memoirs *"There Are Things I Want You to Know" about Stieg Larsson and Me*,¹⁵ that the grief after the loss of her partner and havoc of Larsson's legacy caused by many speculations and legal disputes made her to turn to old Viking rituals to urge for justice. She took a ceramic horse, broke it into pieces and threw them into a lake casting a curse on all individuals she considered harmful to Stieg.¹⁶ The symbolic action of the ritual served here as a desperate attempt to seek justice once the officially recognized authorities had "failed". It also might help her to stop the enemies from their continuing "devastation" of Stieg's legacy by opportunistically oriented individuals entirely for profit. Gabrielsson commented on her behavior with following words:

I couldn't get over my grief and anger at his death and at the people who had not just threatened him but also used him to further their own interests and make a name for themselves." (...) I invoked the old Viking words to punish those who harmed Stieg

¹³ "Lögnaktig bild av Stieg Larsson", *Svenska Dagbladet*, January 30th 2010, [on line] <http://www.svd.se/lognaktig-bild-av-stieg-larsson>, May 17, 2015.

¹⁴ "Dra tillbaka boken, Baksi. Stieg Larssonföre detta kollegor rasar mot felen", [on line] <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article12122372.ab>, May 20, 2015.

¹⁵ E. Gabrielsson, with contr. M.-F. Colombani, *"There Are Things I Want You to Know" about Stieg Larsson and Me*, New York 2011.

¹⁶ "The Publisher that Played with Fire. The Battle for Control of the Larsson's £30m Legacy", *Independent*, December 20, 2013, [on line] <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/the-publisher-who-played-with-fire-the-battle-for-control-of-larssons-30m-legacy-9018974.html>, May 18, 2015); an interesting insight into the Gabrielsson–Larsson relationship is provided by an interview: "Eva Gabrielsson talks to Phil Rickman. Stieg and Me – Memories of my Life with Stieg Larsson", *Hay Festival* 2012, Friday 8 June 2012, [on line] <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-4882-eva-gabrielsson-talks-to-phil-rickman.aspx?skinid=16>, May 19, 2015.

during his life. (...) I asked that people would lose their careers, I asked that they would become sick, and that's what happened. Some even died. It's horrible.¹⁷

Turning to old, pagan rituals may in this case seem odd and deeply irrational. However, *Asatru* – belief in old Nordic gods worshiped by the Vikings – is still deep-rooted in contemporary Nordic societies. Also beyond the region, we find worshipers of Odin, Thor, Frigg, Freya, Hel, and many others constituting the pantheon of old Norse gods and goddesses.¹⁸ The post-modern revival of paganism constitutes one of the visible signs of the post-modern human condition, a condition in which the individual and the collective search for stability becomes a necessity. Especially in times of crisis: financial, political, religious, and also *environmental* since *Asatru* followers regard nature as highly spirited being, requiring full respect and protection. *Asatru* is characterized by the worshipers themselves as a movement with no real religious goal and meaning¹⁹, but rather as cultural, aiming to preserve the Nordic heritage. One of its manifestations might be a plan, approved by the state authorities (in 2015), to build the first Norse gods temple in Reykjavik since the Viking times.²⁰ Paganism in its various forms – like any other activity related to the spiritual sphere – may attract individuals and groups with an inclination to extremism.²¹ This is the case of many Nordic neo-Nazi supporters, whose organizations, actions and leaders had been identified, investigated and strongly criticized in public by Stieg Larsson.

The life of the *Millennium*'s author ended unexpectedly, not only for closest friends, family members, colleagues, co-workers, Norstedts (the publisher of his novels) but also for himself. He left without a farewell, without a will, and with un-

¹⁷ A. Singh, "Stieg Larsson's partner took revenge with 'Viking' curse", *Telegraph*, June 8, 2012, [on line] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/9320391/Hay-Festival-2012-Stieg-Larssons-partner-took-revenge-with-Viking-curse.html>, June 14, 2015.

¹⁸ More about this in M. Banaś, "To Rescue a Dissolving Identity. Nordic Nationalism in the Context of Multiculturalism (Ratując "zanikającą" tożsamość. Nordycki nacjonalizm w kontekście wielokulturowości)", [in:] *Multicultural reality (Rzeczywistość wielokulturowa)*, L. Dyczewski, K. Jurek (ed.), Lublin–Warszawa 2013, pp. 221-240.

¹⁹ E. Addley, "Back for Thor. How Iceland is Reconnecting with its Pagan Past", *The Guardian*, February 6, 2015, [on line] <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/06/back-for-thor-iceland-reconnectinbg-pagan-past>.

²⁰ "Iceland to Build First Temple to Norse Gods in 1,000 Years", *Reuters*, February 2, 2015, [on line] <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/02/03/uk-iceland-religion-pagans-idUKKBN0L70FN20150203>; also: "Iceland to Build First Temple to Norse Gods since Viking Age", *The Guardian*, February 2, 2015, [on line] <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/02/ice-land-temple-norse-gods-1000-years>, June 14, 2015.

²¹ An interesting insight into the phenomenon is provided by M. Gardell in *Gods of the Blood. The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*, Duke University 2003. On religion, religiosity and extremism among plentiful works following this aspect see also: M. Hogg, J. Adelman, R. Blagg, "Religion in the Face of Uncertainty. An Uncertainty-Identity Theory Account of Religiousness", [in:] *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 2009, no. 10, 14/1, pp. 72-83.

finished projects. He planned to start a business, shared with Eva, to locate revenues generated by the sale of the copies of the trilogy.²² A 200-page-long passage of the new, fourth part of *Millennium*, indicated that Larsson was far from thinking about death, whose shadow on the other hand, due to his anti-extremist engagement, had always been present in the couple's life.

The unfinished fourth part became of great value not only as a reminiscence of the writer, but due to its financial potential enclosed in the first chapters. Once developed to a full, complete story, it might bring profits (once again) for Norstedts, David Lagercrantz – a writer specializing in crime stories and biographies, “substituting” for Stieg Larsson – the Larssons' family and possibly some other beneficiaries. The idea had been strongly criticized by Gabrielsson who in an interview stated:

They say heroes are supposed to live forever. That's a load of crap, this is about money. (...) It's about a publishing house that needs money, (and) a writer who doesn't have anything to write so he copies someone else.²³

Two other friends of the writer took a similar stand, Svante Brandén and Anders Lindblom. In an open letter sent to Sweden's biggest newspaper, “Dagens Nyheter”, they compared Lagercrantz's continuation of the *Millennium* series to a disgraceful commercialization of the legacy and an intellectual “grave plundering”.²⁴

The death of Stieg Larsson had many consequences. It triggered processes of a legal, financial, personal and moral character. Accompanied by a multitude of public debates, discussions and speculations became a symbolic history itself fitting like a puzzle to the unreal world described by the nationally and internationally probably most read Swedish author of the second decade of the 21st century.

Fallen symbol

Published in 2010 *Kapuściński non-fiction*, a biography of Ryszard Kapuściński, Poland's most celebrated journalist known for his literary reportage, triggered a heated debate involving a large number of commentators, critics, prominent writers, publishers and readers. Next to Stanislaw Lem, Kapuściński, who died in 2007, was among the few Polish authors who had gained an international reputation of the highest regard. His work was greatly valued by both domestic and foreign critics for

²² The trilogy turned into an unprecedentedly successful project with over 80 million sold copies, source: [on line] <http://www.norstedts.se/millennium> June 15, 2015.

²³ “Stieg Larsson's partner appalled by ‘Millennium business’”, *Business Insider*, March 2015, [on line] <http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-stieg-larssons-partner-appalled-by-millennium-business-2015-3> June 15, 2015.

²⁴ “Hånet mot vår vän Stieg”, *Dagens Nyheter*, October 8, 2015, [on line] <http://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/kulturdebatt/hanet-mot-var-van-stieg/> June 15, 2015, also: “Vännerna rasar över nya Millenniumboken”, *SVT.Kultur*, [on line] <http://www.svt.se/kultur/bok/vannerna-1>, June 15, 2015.

an original combination of accuracy and artistry constituting a vehicle for universal messages. In the common opinion in Poland (but also abroad) Kapuściński's legacy represented one example of the world's canon of deeply engaged literary reportage.²⁵

Masterpieces of reportage, such as *The Emperor*, on the downfall of autocracy in Ethiopia; *Ebony*, about Africa of the 1960s and the 1970s; *Shah of Shahs*, about the 1979 Iranian Revolution, provided grounds for calling Kapuściński the king of journalistic reportage. As the unquestionable leader of Polish journalism, he was an inspiration and role model for young students of journalism. A frequent guest speaker at universities at home and abroad, he taught the difficult craft of a reporter, sharing his knowledge on how to present the often complex nature of the events without distorting the principles of reporting. He considered this form of journalism to be particularly "sensitive to the truth" and called for the facts to be faithfully reflected.²⁶

This is how Kapuściński portrayed himself and how he was seen by a number of dedicated readers, reviewers, critics, publishers and those who regarded his principles of journalism highly. In line with these principles, only an adequate description of the facts allowed for a true understanding of the world. For many decades, until 2010, Kapuściński's role as a model reporter was unquestionable and unchallenged.

The change came suddenly and surprisingly. For a few weeks in February and March of 2010, the figure and work of Kapuściński headlined all the major Polish media. The headlines focused on the previously unknown claims which Artur Domosławski, the author of Kapuściński's new biography, presented in his book. Daily newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations devoted much attention to the new biography. Information provided by the media contained, however, important news: that this version differed from all previous biographies of Kapuściński, because it revealed his revised, not idealized picture.²⁷

Kapuściński – non-fiction, provoked a fierce debate for yet another reason. It was written by a former student of Kapuściński and later also his friend. Using a long acquaintance with the master, Domosławski was in a unique position to write the biography. Thus, his version compared to other earlier biographies written by

²⁵ Kapuściński received many awards including *doctor honoris causa* from institutions in Poland and abroad, inter alia: Hanseatic Goethe Prize, Prix Tropiques of the French Development Agency, Premio Internazionale Viareggio-Versilia, Premio Ilaria Alpi alla carrier, The Lettre Ulysses Awards for the Art of Reportage.

²⁶ See: *Herodotus and the Art of Noticing*, a keynote speech given by Kapuściński on the occasion of being awarded the 'Lettre Ulysses Awards for the Art of Reportage' in Berlin, October 4th 2003, [on line] <http://www.lettre-ulysses-award.org/index03/index03.html>, June 17, 2015.

²⁷ Other biographies of Kapuściński are written by B. Nowacka, Z. Ziątek, *Ryszard Kapuściński. Biografia pisarza*, Kraków 2008; K. Król, *Kapuściński. Wielkie biografie*, Warszawa 2011; B. Wróblewski, *Życie jest z „Przenikania...” Szkice o Twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego*, Warszawa 2008; M. Sadowski, *Ryszard Kapuściński. Fotobiografia*, Warszawa 2013. Worth stressing is that Domosławski's publication apart, the effect of unfolding the writer's work praxis had provided another reason to revise understanding of many aspects of societal change in Poland after 1950.

different authors drew much more attention of readers and buyers. The previous biographies, however, had one thing in common: a rather one-sided, positive picture of Kapuściński. This uncritical attitude provoked an impression that it was simply inappropriate to discuss his legacy and life in terms other than positive. The new biography by Domosławski dissented from this hagiographic trend. The narrative of the book indicated that the idealized portrayal of Kapuściński as a perfect reporter was unjustified. It provided evidence that some of Kapuściński's collections of reportage, called in public masterpieces of the genre, did not deserve that attribute owing to high content of literary fiction. This harsh conclusion was similar to another critique made by Jack Shaper, a journalist working for the American magazine *Slate*.²⁸

Working on the biography for three years, Domosławski relied on family archives, notes, documents, tape recordings of loose thoughts and commentaries left by Kapuściński and provided by his family. Upon publication of the biography, this reliance on the family sources was used against the biographer. The author was accused of abusing trust and long-term friendship. He was also attacked for not respecting his master by exposing some of the previously unknown facts which could tarnish the reporter's reputation.

The methodology applied by Domosławski while working on the biography included – part desk research and interviews with relatives – trips to places visited by Kapuściński and as well as described in his texts. Going to the same places in Angola, Ethiopia, Iran, Mexico and Cuba allowed him to confront Kapuściński's accounts with what some of the living witnesses of the reported events still remembered.

Confrontation of the texts with reality did not fare well. The discrepancies between the facts and the events as reported by Kapuściński were evidence enough to continue regarding his prose as literary reportage. Although the stylistic qualities of Kapuściński's texts remained the same, the texts' classification changed from non-fiction to fiction. Rather frequently, the reporter modified presented facts by exaggerating their elements and departing from their original form. This became evident from the following examples:

- 1) In *Shah of Shahs*, Kapuściński wrote that thousands of people were murdered during the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The official data gathered after the end of the coup indicate 1400 victims, indeed a large number in terms of human lives, but several hundred are not thousands. Further in the same work, he claimed hundreds of thousands of political prisoners. Contrary to that, however, Abbas Milani, one of the then imprisoned opponents of the regime, estimated the correct number to be about 4500. Again a difference – again very significant;²⁹

²⁸ J. Shafer, "The Lies of Ryszard Kapuściński. Or, if you prefer, the 'magical realism' of the now-departed master", *Slate*, January 25, 2007, [on line] http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/press_box/2007/01/the_lies_of_rysard_kapuciski.single.html, June 20, 2015.

²⁹ *Kapuściński non-fiction*, p. 422.

- 2) In *The Emperor*, a book about the downfall of Haile Selassie and the overthrow of the empire in Ethiopia in 1974, we read how the Emperor's favorite dog Lulu, was allowed to urinate on courtiers' legs and shoes. In fact, it would be unthinkable, because it would mean that the enlightened and benign emperor allowed for extreme humiliation, of other people ('humiliation of humiliations' if you like). This is a contrary view of individuals with deeper understanding of Ethiopian history and culture, including Harold Markus, professor of University of East Lansing/Michigan and Barbara Goshu, painter residing in the capital of Ethiopia, an eyewitness of the events from the early 1970s;³⁰
- 3) In a series of reports entitled *The Christ with a Rifle*, where Kapuściński describes Bolivia's internal revolt, he portrays Peredo Romulo, a known opposition figure, as an intemperate, scandalizing journalist fabricating stories to blackmail church notables. On the contrary, Peredo, a former democratic politician and senator, was remembered by his contemporaries as a respected figure in Bolivian public life, a man who deserved an entry in the main Bolivian encyclopedia. For reasons unknown to us, Kapuściński "ignored" these facts;³¹
- 4) A section about Uganda in another of Kapuściński's books, *Ebony*, likewise provoked many doubts. The author described Lake Victoria and the incredible size of fish that lived in these waters. He linked the size of fish to a claim that the fish fed on the human remains of the murdered opponents of the military dictator and President of Uganda – Idi Amin. In fact, the reason for the unusual increase in fish weight would rather be attributed to an experiment carried out in the 1950s by the British colonial army. The introduction into the lake of a predatory species of Nile perch led to the gradual disappearance of smaller species. The claim that human remains were disposed in the lake cannot be dismissed with absolute certainty, but nonetheless it would not seem to be the most likely explanation to the ecological change that occurred in the lake. Undoubtedly though, the impact of this kind of descriptions on readers' imagination remains immense.³²

In the 1990s, an article by John Ryle was published in the *Times Literary Supplement*. The author revealed numerous inconsistencies and discrepancies in some of Kapuściński's texts on Africa. According to Ryle, *Ebony* contained so many of them that it could not be regarded as a series of news reports. To fiction readers, *Ebony* constituted a very interesting and entertaining literature. To readers who sought factual accuracy, naming Kapuściński's work as news reports was however profoundly misleading.³³

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 417.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 432.

³² Ibidem, p. 433.

³³ P. Zajas, "Lost Cosmonauts. On Ryszard Kapuściński's *Imperium* and Its Critics – Once More", [in:] *Teksty Drugie* no. 2, 2014, Special issue: Nonfiction, reportage, testimony, Instytut Badań Literackich 2014, pp. 237-252; also: P. Zajas, *Jak świat prawdziwy stał się bajką. O literaturze niefikcyjnej*, Poznań 2011; P. Zajas, "Wokół 'Kapuściński non-fiction'. Próba podsumowania i ewaluacji dyskusji", *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1-2, 2011, pp. 265-

Reporting as a form of journalism can be understood in various ways. Even Kapuściński himself talked about it and distinguished between the Anglo-Saxon and the continental style of reporting. He taught that the former was characterized by maximum factual accuracy and extreme objectivity, while the latter allowed for a reporter's subjectivity and more extensive style enhancing comments. With his roots in continental Europe, Kapuściński was an outstanding follower of the latter. The question, however, insists upon a more a precise answer – to what extent “comments” are allowed to modify the subject they pertain to? Some help in understanding the nature of Kapuściński's case may be provided by “American journalism” – a trend deriving from the 1960s, which in many respects resembles a “journalistic novel” rather than reportage.³⁴

Deliberations on how to classify Kapuściński's prose were for long time present as one of the leading and crucial subjects among journalists, specialists in media and communication, university scholars and ordinary readers, whose opinions and judgments were outcomes of their individual sensitivity to the accuracy of the images of reality, presented by the author as an intermediary.

In the context of the discussed problem once again some principal issues come to the fore concerning:

- moral law, or its absence, as a basis for exploiting friendship and confidentiality to collect information presenting a thorough picture of a person, along with his/her weaknesses. In the case of Kapuściński, among the new facts revealed in the biography was his assumed cooperation with the state security service, especially in the 1950s and the 1960s, as well as fabrication of certain elements of his own curriculum vitae. The latter is exemplified by a claim about his father escaping from a Soviet transport to Katyń, while in fact never even being a Soviet captive;
- the nature of reportage – what it really is and whether Kapuściński's prose should still be regarded as journalistic reportage. If so, should it be presented as a model to follow for students of journalism?
- some reluctance or inability of Polish readers and critics to confront the truth about Kapuściński with the widespread myths about his life and work. What comes into play here is also the need of society to maintain its clear, archetypal role models, ideals to follow, heroes once placed by society high on a pedestal.

-278; J. Morawiecki, “Cesarz reportażu bez reportażu. O konserwacji i erozji zaufania na przykładzie Imperium Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego”, *e-Znaczenia. Kultura, komunikacja, społeczeństwo*, Poznań 2015, [on line] <http://www.e-znaczenia.pl/?p=653>; J. Klejnocki, “Kapuściński. Zmysłny reporter”, *Focus – Historia*, June 15, 2015, [on line] <http://historia.focus.pl/polska/kapuscinski-zmyslny-reporter-1729>, June 25, 2015.

³⁴ A comprehensive introduction into American journalism is given inter alia by D. Mindich, *Just the facts. How 'objectivity' came to define American journalism*, New York 1998; see also: “The Reconstruction of American Journalism”, A report by L. Downie, Jr., M. Schudson, *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 2009, [on line] http://www.cjr.org/reconstruction/the_reconstruction_of_american.php, June 30, 2015.

Attempts to question such myths by showing more than the merely positive aspects of a hero's life introduces a state of social unrest and opposition against those who seek to shed light on the problem from a different perspective.

Questions to be borne are numerous and affect both the moral sphere, as well as the sphere of journalistic craft and ethic. First – being one of Kapuściński's students and later a friend, should Domosławski have engaged in researching his legacy and writing the biography? Maybe it would have been better if these matters were dealt with by an author who did not remain in personal relationship with the reporter? Second – why did Kapuściński fabricate certain elements of his own biography? Was it politically or socially driven? Or was it a need stemming from the inside of his journalistic personality – an *alter ego*, that could not shake off the temptation of creativity, a temptation to modify facts so that they become more convincing and convey a message which might otherwise appear not attractive?

A search for answers had been provoked with the release of the biography *Kapuściński non-fiction*. However, to find them may be more difficult than expected due to the fact, that the book, its first version, got a supplement in form of a new version modified and readjusted according to the will of the writer's wife – Alicja Kapuścińska.³⁵ In a legal dispute launched against Domosławski, her lawyers managed to convince the court to rule in favor of the widow.

From the cultural anthropological perspective, but also from the axiological and phenomenological as well, a comparison of these two versions would be of high relevance, indicating what data had been omitted, removed or modified. This problem, however, exceeds the frame of this article, opening door to a new research dedicated to a discourse analysis of a human life.

A writer, journalist, reporter, political activist or any other outstanding individual who gains respect from society due to his charismatic character and attitude may become a symbolic person. This was the case with both Kapuściński and Larsson. Both worked as journalists, both revealed their dedication to writing, which became a passion and way of life. A mission to "bring the truth" to their readers (Larsson on neo-Nazism in Sweden and discrimination of women; Kapuściński on inequality and imbalance between poor and rich countries) made them into symbolic persons. Both of them became symbols of persistence, dedication, strength to overcome obstacles and, above all, symbols of not giving up even in the face of potential danger (Larsson – threats from the extremists; Kapuściński – travels in Africa). The popularity of their works (Larsson, after his death; Kapuściński, during his life) received a symbolic "stigma" attached to their names. Of particular relevance is the question regarding circumstances and factors conducive for this symbolic creation. In the

³⁵ A. Domosławski, *Ryszard Kapuściński. A life*, Verso 2012.

case of the *Millennium* author, an explanation might be – apart from his unexpected death – his uncompromising attitude to destroy the illusion, the fictive picture of Swedish society as free from discrimination. For the author of *Ebony*, the fact that he was loyal to the authoritarian Communist party ruling Poland for decades until 1989.

Debates, initiated in Sweden and Poland respectively around the legacy of these journalists and writers, provide a rich material for the analysis of symbolic types, a term proposed by Richard Grathoff and developed by Donald Handelman.³⁶ A charismatic person who has been given public trust and/or support for his/her actions may gain a symbolic status by representing features that are required, valued or preferred by members of that society. This symbolic status may, however, transform gradually into a symbolic type in which the individual in question becomes self-referential, “(...) ceases to modify his or her behavior in response to the reactions of others.”³⁷ In such a situation, the individual takes over the role of a moderator of a reflexive relation of *individual – society*, stimulating or forcing others to adjust to dictated rules.

In the light of undisclosed facts and analyzing from the time perspective the works of Kapuściński and Larsson, we get an impression that they, as journalists and writers, lived their professional lives in a hyper realistic way. Facts, data, events, processes they observed and participated in, experienced and described in their texts became “more real and visible” for a reader who otherwise might have overlooked or ignored them. Kapuściński and Larsson following their mission respectively, not only incorporated the rules constructed by society, but modified and adapted them to their own visions of the world. This is how they might have understood the mandate to “be true to one self” and to the values they assigned highest rank.

Handelman, although discussing the symbolic type in the context of circus, put the question of the truth and reality in the following words:

(...) the performing body of the symbolic type, the reality it projects is temporarily made ‘really real’, as it were – because the type is so self-consistent, so wholly true to itself.³⁸

Being true to oneself, however, does not diminish or annihilate the special relation each individual constructs with other members of society. Interactivity typical for human behavior stimulates a give-and-take process, which permanently transacts between an individual and a group (community, society). During that process social roles are produced and performed by each individual according to his/her abilities, potential, and in accordance with the needs of the group (community, society). The cases discussed here provide rich material on how society constructs

³⁶ R. Grathoff, *The Structure of Social Inconsistencies. A Contribution to a Unified Theory of Play, Game and Social Action*, Hague 1970.

³⁷ D. Handelman, “Symbolic Type, the Body, and Circus”, [in:] *Semiotica*, no. 85-3/4, 1991, p. 207.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 206.

an individual and how an individual in a mutual dependency constructs him/herself to meet the needs and expectations of the others. Examples of this process had been analyzed in countless scientific articles and books.³⁹ Our focus, however, should be directed on the specific dimensions to which the two cases belong: journalism and literature. In the first one, credibility, scrutiny and responsibility for information play a fundamental role; in the latter, creativity exists with other competencies and skills. Combining these two dimensions over time seems to have taken place in Kapuściński's and Larsson's works and resulted in the intermingling of methods typical for these dimensions. For Larsson, turning from journalism to activist rhetoric might have been something more natural considering circumstances of his life. For Kapuściński the transition from reportage to literary reportage not only had other origins (since he lived in different cultural and political environment), but also to have pushed the boundaries of generally understood reportage into a kind of 'creative reportage'. Thus worlds, people, places, processes, times, etc. presented in this writing form were more constructed than reconstructed, more fictive than real.

For a professional reporter, naming things by their real name is fundamental. For a fiction writer, words serve to build metaphors of real life. For a reader, in turn, of highest importance might be to know what kind of text he holds in his hands before reading. Why? Because it might influence his perception of the world. Most of us would rather prefer to construct this picture not by reflections from a distorted mirror.

Deconstructing the legacies of Kapuściński and Larsson provides exemplification of symbolic types. Although not completely similar, they have one shared core, a profound feature to disturb, to shake, to make noticeable because "(...) The symbolic type is a rare but potent moulder of the realities of others."⁴⁰

³⁹ Fundamental works on that had been written by inter alia: Victor Turner, Gregory Bateson, Erving Goffman.

⁴⁰ D. Handelman, *Symbolic Type*, from SRB Archive, The Semiotic Review of Books, vol. 5 (1), [on line] <http://www.univie.ac.at/wissenschaftstheorie/srb/srb/symbolic.html>, June 22, 2011.